

Benner, Arthur
interviewed by Don Sparrow on
September 20, 1988, Eastham, MA

Eastham Historical Society-Oral Histories
1 audiocassette (ca. 90 min.)+transcript

Cedar Banks Golf Course (Eastham, MA)
Asparagus growing

Rum Running

Brackett's Store (Eastham, MA)
Eastham (MA) Post Office

This is an oral history interview with Arthur Benner, taking place at the home of the interviewer, Don Sparrow. This is part of the Oral History Project of the Eastham Historical Society. The date is September 20, 1988.

DS: Art has lived in Eastham all of his life and he is about three or four years older than I, which makes him about 70. Art, I'd like to talk about Eastham the way it was when we were growing up. There are a lot of subjects: asparagus farming and turnips, Sam Brackett's store, but can we start with rum-running? You were too young to be a rumrunner, I know.

AB: I always said if I was about 20 years older I'd have been one of the best rumrunners in the business. That's up for grabs, but anyway, I always sort of regretted that.

As a kid, you know, I was aware of all the activity, I think, in that area, as much as you would be when you were older, but at that time, of course, the Cape being as barren as it was and unsettled, there were many places where they had ports of entry, and unchallenged I suppose for the most part. I understand that one of the fish weirs in Brewster was one of the prime spots of unloading.

DS: That was right near the breakwater.

AB: Yes. There was one incident, where apparently a rumrunner was being chased by the authorities, and he dumped a load off of Sunken Meadow Landing. As a kid I used to go duck hunting in that area, and as I went down there after school one night, here were all these cars there, gathered, and I assumed they were all hunters and I galloped out of there and went back to Great Pond. I had my father's Model-T truck. And there was opportunity trying to break the door down and I wouldn't let it in!

Anyway, I got home about dark and my poor father was wondering where I was and where his truck was. But at that time it had gotten to be dark and those that had cashed in on it were some of the local townspeople, and it was a thing that was very welcome, because that was during the depression years, you know, and some of the folks realized a pretty good dollar out of that. I wasn't one of those few, but that's beside the point.

DS: The liquor was in what they call cases?

AB: That's right.

DS: These were burlap bags with straw and about twelve bottles?

AB: That's right. I remember the brands as being Log Cabin, Golden Wedding, Old Crow. And there was champagne, which I'm not sure what the name of that was, but some of those who were

aware that it came in when it did, on the flood tide, took advantage of it. But everyone supposed that the evening tide would be just as good, but the wind shifted to the east and carried the remainder of it off shore and there was very little gotten that night. But as a kid I had visualized which thing I was going to buy-- this thing or that thing, you know--

DS: With the proceeds?

AB: Yes, with the proceeds, which never came to pass.

DS: Who would you have sold the-- ?

AB: Well, that never entered my head of course at the time, but I think there were numerous buyers around. Wouldn't be any great trouble to unload it.

DS: I've heard that ^{Quincy}~~Quentin~~ Shaw was one of the buyers.

AB: I wouldn't be surprised. Yes, I guess I've heard of others which I can't recall.

DS: Now you say the tide moved these things out, but they must have been just barely on the bottom.

AB: Yeah, they would bounce along, I suppose, and there was enough buoyancy in the cases, some of them at least, so that they

just went along with the tide.

DS: And this was merchandise that a rumrunner had been forced to throw overboard, because he was being chased?

AB: Well, that's the assumption. Of course by the same token he might have unloaded, figuring for someone to pick it up on the low tide, but that's up for grabs too. But anyway, it was jettisoned, and it was quite a little thing in those days, but I wasn't one of the fortunate ones to be able to take advantage of it.

DS: Was your father involved in it?

AB: No. He perhaps would have been, but I was the culprit. You see, I had the vehicle, and he didn't know where I was, so of course that was all up in the air. But everybody assumed that the night tide would be just as productive, which, of course, it wasn't.

But that was only one of many things. The Cape in this area was a prime place for unloading and there were a number of places in town that used to, y in town that used to, you know, have where they'd put it in for delivery and so forth. And they were sort of the outside people. So it was quite a little industry behind the scenes, you might say.

DS: Now most of this stuff went up to Boston or other places?

AB: I suppose.

DS: Do you know how they carried it up?.

AB: Well, I suppose by any means. Mostly automobiles or trucks. I suppose in the case of a truck, it would be would be camouflaged with fish crates or something of the sort. I guess they got grabbed sometimes. I don't know what their percentage of success was, but I guess it was pretty good.

DS: Who were some of the other people that were rumrunners? Now I know that Bud Cummings, for example, was an authentic rumrunner. And I've heard that Foster Atwood was involved. Was Zibe Crosby involved?

AB: Well, I'm not sure. He could have been. Of course there were so many people, I suppose, that were involved, either quite a bit or not so much, you know, in one way or another. But as a kid, you know, those things kind of go over your head more. But there was a lot of activity. In fact, I remember someone who I only met once, who came from Quincy somewhere, and he was a former rumrunner. He said, we used to unload around here all the time. He was very casual about it. Of course this was many years later.

DS: Art Nickerson told me they made up tongs from garden rakes

with extended handles, so they could reach down and grab the cases. Now you were starting to tell me about some other devices.

AB: Yes. They had these grappling hook affairs and there were numbers of places on the Bay side and down at Beach Hill was a place where they had dumped liquor. I don't know under what circumstances, but there was quite a turnout. And at that time, I think it was-- let's see, the road that goes down by the golf course, and that was a very rural road at that time.

DS: This is Beach Hill in Wellfleet?

AB: Yes. This would be going towards Island and down the beach that way. It looked like the western migration of covered wagons, you know, there were so many of them, and someone got stuck and it was quite a thing. But when they had got their paraphernalia all together, the two with this liquor, the Coast Guard would be there and when they'd see someone bring something in, they'd come over and push him away and break it up or something. And that sort of thing, you know. So there was probably a great deal more there, but it was scattered pretty much, you know.

DS: The Coast Guard knew this was happening, of course?

AB: Oh, yes, sure they did.

DS: Did they really try to stop it or were they-- ?

AB: Some did more than others. But there was one skipper on the local level that someone said, "I expect you were one of the biggest rumrunners there were," and he said, "Probably I was."

DS: This is the Coast Guard?

AB: Yes. So anyway, I guess it was not that much of a secret really. Of course, there were times, I suppose, when they had to extend themselves a little more than others to keep their image up. But anyway--

DS: Now I've been told that most of the officials in all of the towns were on the payroll. You know, on the take. We won't mention any names in Eastham. [Laughter] But I've heard that the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen in Dennis, for example, at that time, his barn was used as what they call a drop. They'd transfer the liquor to his barn for safekeeping.

AB: That's right.

DS: Well, why don't we come back to rumrunning. Let's change the subject for the time being. You started to tell me a while ago about Sam Brackett's store and you remembered going in the front door and you were describing the various things. Why don't

you go through that again? What was in the store?

AB: Well, of course at that time, that was before chain stores came in. That was the headquarters of--well, a number of towns, you might say, and a great many people that went there or traded there would arrive there in a horse and wagon or a horse and buggy and so forth, and it was quite an institution, especially as a kid. It made quite an impression on me.

As you came in the entrance door, on your left was the big candy counter, which was the number one object. and then on the north wall were all the patent medicines. As you came on down, there was a counter was a big coffee grinder and a hand of bananas, and if you went still further, to go out to the back part, there was the sugar and the flour barrels. There were the buggy whips, which hung in a little circular affair. And on the south side of the store was a little cubicle where the bookkeeping was done in a little office like. And there was another showcase which had odds and ends, I can't remember just which. The dry goods, yard goods, was on the south side of the store, another big counter.

And I remember there was a big iron safe where the bookkeeping was done, I suppose to keep their money and stuff. Then there was a sort of a separation, almost a partition between the two sides, and there was a big wooden box which had rubber boots, which was one of the necessities of that time. And there were slickers, rain gear, all that sort of thing.

Then there was a staircase that led upstairs, which was just

before you went out to the back part of the store. And they had dishware and such things as that up there. I can't remember just what they were, but odds and ends of things. And if you went out to the next part of the building, you'd be into where they did their deliveries, where they unloaded their eggs and the grain, and where ^{George}~~Judd~~ Wiley's delivery wagon was and so forth. There was a big, big ice chest out there, where the soda pop and the salt pork and the meat was kept. Downstairs from there was a molasses barrel, where the molasses was kept, and someone left the spigot open one day and all the barrel of molasses went all over the floor, and we always smelt that nice aroma afterwards.

Then the next section out was where the grain and that sort of thing-- I guess there was coal and so forth, hardware. And then beyond that was a sort of an enclosure, where all the cartons and the debris was kept. And then there was a little small one-car garage. And then beyond that was where the barn stood and sheds and so forth were fixed to it. In the barn there was a nice buggy, a rubber-tired buggy, and an old Reo truck that they had scrapped for some reason or another, and the horse was kept off to one side of that. Then there was another shed, which was just near the road from that.

But that's a thumbnail description of the buildings. And the store itself, as it stands now, is half of its original length, as you know.

DS: They carried everything. Feed and grain and hay and coal and oil and dry goods. Meats, vegetables, canned goods, the

whole thing.

AB: Yep.

DS: Now the candy counter was on your left as you came in?

AB: Right. As I recall, that would be the first showcase there was.

DS: And that was full of penny candy.

AB: Yes. And the penny candy then was a bit larger than the nickel bars are today. Thirty cents used to be a penny. And that always fascinated me, because if you paid your grocery bill-- which most people did semiannually or whatever, when the crops came in or when the shellfish came in-- Mr. Brackett would always fill up a big bag of candy. And that's all I was interested in, the candy, never mind of the rest of it, you know. And I'll always remember that.

DS: He gave it to you free?

AB: Yes. That was a fringe benefit.

DS: When you paid your annual or semiannual bill?

AB: Yes. And that's the way people lived then. People like Joe

Dill, who cashed in on their eels that they had gathered in, you know, and so forth. It was a different way of life all together.

DS: Joe Dill-- and he had what? These were eels from the Salt Pond?

AB: Well, I'm not sure where they got them, but they had what they call-- it's a wooden gadget, where they trap or something, where they put them as they got them. Then in the fall, when the price was good, they'd just barrel them up in barrels and ship them to the market.

DS: I guess they would be called pots.

AB: Yes.

DS: We did that one summer. My father did and I remember that. Then the candy, the penny candies, were chocolate and licorice and hard balls and--

AB: Yes. You had nougatines, old-fashioneds, bolsters, some sort of a coconut thing. They were so nicely done, you know. The quality was there. And I always think of that-- gee, if you had a case of that, you could retire today. [Laughter] But that was it.

DS: And then they also had a patent medicine-- and you could

get--

AB: Oh, yes. Father Jeromes, Lydia Pinkham's or whatever, you know.

DS: Musterole?

AB: Yes. The worst thing that ever happened. The cure was worse than the illness.

DS: Right. The musterole, I remember that.

AB: What horrible stuff that was.

DS: Get in your eyes and in your throat!

AB: Oh, it was terrible.

DS: And then there was this Iodex. That was the salve you put on for swollen glands. And then they had something called drawing salve, didn't they?

AB: Oh, they did. They had so many things that I couldn't begin to recall half of them. As I say, the shelves were lined with these things. If only someone may have a photograph or something that you could bring those names out, it would be quite interesting.

DS: Fletcher's Castoria was another one.

AB: Yes. Oh, that was an old standby. Sure. And the worst thing, I think-- the very worst of the worst was castor oil.

DS: Yes. I hated that.

AB: Oh, that was horrid. That was terrible stuff.

DS: Now the doctors were either Dr. Bell or Dr. White. Those are the ones I remember.

AB: Dr. Marvel too.

DS: And Dr. Marvel. And they came to the house. You didn't have to go. And they carried a big box with all sorts of pills and liquids in it. Were there any drug stores? Oh, there was Livingston's that I remember.

AB: Well, I don't seem to recall any.

DS: There was none in Eastham.

AB: I don't think so that I remember. I don't know where the nearest one would have been really.

DS: So any medication you bought off the shelf, patent medicine, or the doctor gave you?

AB: Yes, I expect that's the way it was, yes. Dr. Marvel, who was the doctor in Orleans, he took care of Eastham and all points, I guess. I remember him, as a very small child. He had a raccoon coat and he smoked cigars that always felt good, you know, real nice aroma. And he was a very nice, fine gentleman. And I think he would have gotten to you, if he had to have snowshoes. Because he was very dedicated, as they were at that time.

DS: We used Bell and Bell was the same way. He would come--

AB: Any time of the day or night. Yes. Right. Well, we had Dr. Bell too.

DS: I remember he vaccinated all four of us boys. We all lined up and he went bing, bing, bing, bing, and put the plaster on. And he took out tonsils in the living room.

AB: On the table, right. Sure.

DS: My brother Robert had his tonsils taken out and the rest of us were hanging outside and watching in the window.

AB: I know it. That's the way it was. Sure.

DS: Well, getting back to Brackett's store. He had dry goods. That was a line of clothing. Mostly work clothes?

AB: Yes. Yard goods, you know. Well, it was just yard goods. That's all I can tell you know. But all shapes, sizes, colors and dimensions and so forth on rolls. And of course people did more of their own millinery work at that time.

Let me see, what else? I'm not naming half of the things they really-- but they had a stove which was down-- well, opposite where the bananas were kept. You know, halfway between the two sides, and I suppose that they used coal in that, burned coal. But when I think of the expanse of that building, I don't ever remember it was cold in there, you know, but that's all they had for heat.

DS: In the summertime they probably had these fly coils hanging?

AB: Oh, yeah. That's true, they did. And I was told, my daddy told me that-- I get my names mixed up a little-- whether it was George Dill or George Gill built that store. One or the other was a contractor or builder. Now George Dill would be Hermie's father, wouldn't he? Is that right?

DS: I guess so, yes.

AB: Was he Selectman or something at one time?

DS: I think so.

AB: Well, this must have been Gill, because I think he lived over there where Collis Peters used to live. I think that was it, yes.

DS: There was a Shinner Dill. What was his first name?

AB: Fred. Fred Dill.

DS: Now he was the mosquito control man?

AB: That's right. He was involved in insurance and he headed up the mosquito control.

DS: He lived where the Wonderstrand Farm is?

AB: Right.

DS: And Collis Peters' place now was a Gill?

AB: Yes. That's where this George Gill lived. Before my time, I guess. But yes, Jim Brole lived there in more recent years and brought his family up there. And then, let's see, who lived there next? There was another family that lived there more recently, but I can't recall their name now. But that's where Collis Peters lived.

DS: That must have been something, when that molasses barrel--

AB: Oh, yes. That really must have been a mess. I suppose they scraped it and got most of it up, but of course it's there forever in the woods, you know. A good preservative, I think.

DS: Now I remember when Sam Brackett's store closed down. They had a going-out-of-business sale. And some of the things there-- there were high-button shoes and all sorts of objects that you hadn't seen for quite a while.

AB: Sure. I was there at least one evening when that was going on. And, of course, the locals were there to bid on this or that. It was interesting to see such a variety of things. Spices and little cans of this and little cans of that. But that was the beginning of the end. That's when it wound up.

DS: Now that was the North Eastham store, and I guess the George Clark store was the center-of-town store.

AB: Yes. That was a similar operation.

DS: You went to one or the other?

AB: Yes.

DS: And was the post office in Sam Brackett's store?

AB: Not to my knowledge. No, the post office, the earliest post office I recall in North Eastham was a little small building which was on the left hand on the west side of Route 6, just after you get by the two-story which George Wiley's folks had. Brad Steele owned it in later years and now it's a rental affair. But it would have been about seventy-five yards before you get to Nauset Market on the left-hand side, northbound, on the west side of the road. A little square building. And there was a gentleman whose name was Harding, who was the postmaster at that time. And that closed down shortly thereafter, and then the post office was moved to Obed Horton's store, as part of that.

DS: That's where the Nauset Market is?

AB: The Nauset Market is, yes, the original store. Then after he retired or passed away, for a short time it was over where Roach's mixing plant is, a little small building there, and I think Smitty-- a fellow that saved my life incidentally-- ran it.

DS: Clarence? Was that Clarence Smith?

AB: Yes. He ran it for a little while. And then from there it went near Clayton Horton's. Ray Scribbins ran it. And then it went over to-- across from-- we had a golf course there. Over there for a short time. Then it's up where it is now. I guess

that's the order of the sequence. It's moved around. So it moved around quite a bit really.

There were a lot of stories connected with the old post office. They told me the old-timers-- I'm one myself now, but they used to go in there when Henry Harding, I think was his name, was sorting mail by the lamplight, and they'd blow in through the letter hole and blow the lamp out. All kinds of goings on. [Laughter]

DS: I remember when Obed Horton's store had a going-out-of-business sale and there was some publicity in the paper and they said that the store sold everything from pins to dynamite.

AB: It just about did at that. You know, it's amazing, the small size of the building actually, as we think of buildings today, the number of things that he carried in that thing. He would have such things as shotgun shells, twenty-twos, and the little dry goods. You could buy socks there. And the locals used to play cards there at night and it was a perfect replica of a western saloon. The smoke would be thick and Obed would circulate around with some salted peanuts, so they would buy some soda pop, you know, and such things as that.

I was told that Maurice Wiley went in there one night and he threw a big truck inner tube in the stove, the pot-bellied stove.

DS: Maurice Wiley?

AB: Yeah. And I mean it was touch and go, because of course you know what that would do. They said the flame was going right out of the chimney and poor Obed was going around in circles. I don't know how they probably cut it down, but can you imagine that!

DS: The stench must have been awful.

AB: Yes, it perhaps was. I'm sure it would have been outside anyway. It's too bad we couldn't have some recordings of the conversations and the goings on there.

DS: What kind of card games did they play?

AB: Well, I don't know really, because I wasn't in it at that time. I have no idea, whether it was poker or bridge whist, whatever.

DS: They weren't gambling, were they?

AB: No! Gambling-- well, that could well be. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they did. Of course the stakes would have been pretty small, because these were thin years.

DS: That's the thing that I have difficulty in relating to the current inhabitants of Eastham. It was a completely different economy.

AB: Well, you think back when you were a kid, you know, and you wanted this and that, but it was as far away as the moon. It was completely out of the question. It was a very simple life. But I would like to go back to it really. In lots of ways, you know.

DS: In some ways, yes.

AB: You had the freedom which you'll never have again. And the geography of the town was very open. You had fields under cultivation, pasture land. Now it's all choked up with growth and stuff, you know, by comparison. And places that used to be visible-- well, like the Town Cove. You could go along there and you could look down anywhere in the Cove, which you can't much of any any more. And so many places like that. All this area-- well, you know yourself, around here it was a lot of rolling ground and you could see for such a distance.

DS: From here you could see right to the ocean. In fact, when my mother built this house, you could see the ocean from the living room. When we came down here in 1959, if you got up in the upstairs window, you could just barely catch a glimpse of the ocean. Now, of course, you'd have to get up on the roof and you might not be able to see it then.

AB: Well, Lloyd told me here a short time ago that when he was a youngster, that from their place over here they could look over

to the Coast Guard Station, see his dad harness the horse. That's almost unbelievable. I believe him anyway. That's the way it was. That's the difference.

DS: He told me he remembered when the U-boat shelled the barges off shore, and he heard the guns, and he went running from his house all the way down to the ocean to see the excitement. And he said he could see everything right from his house. There were no trees or anything. He just could run through the fields all the way down there.

AB: Holy smokes! Think of it. Gee!

DS: Well, let's see, we ought to talk about farming. You people did turnips and asparagus, I know. How many acres of land did your father have?

AB: Well, let's see, it must have been five-- oh, I'd say about twelve altogether. In two sections, you know. Of course he did his best in asparagus plants and seedlings, and as a kid that was the most disagreeable thing in the world to work on, because they were delicate things. They were planted as you would plant seed like turnip seed and other things, plant them, and they would come up very delicate little things and they had to be hand-weeded and so forth on your hands and knees, and your knees would get sore and your hands would get sore and the gnat flies would be thick and you'd like to be anywhere but there.

But anyway, that's what you did. And they had to be dusted with a thing like a hand organ and with hydrated lime in the poison, whatever it was, and you'd get a back draft and it would come back in your face. All kinds of miserable things. But he was very successful. And those would be plowed out when they were two-- let's see, two-year-old plants I think it was-- and they would be plowed out, forked onto a Model-T truck, taken home and counted out by the thousand, which he sold to seed houses or growers, whoever would buy them. And he always said that he made out much better with them than he did the cutting beds. Of course, when he got into the cutting end of it, it was almost on the brink of the end of the asparagus industry here, because of the competition from outside places. But it was quite active for some time even so.

And he had, besides his own bed, a separate bed, which was an experimental bed. The Waltham Experimental Station approached him to get a section of ground which was in plots, and so marked with fertilizer for this one and that one and all that sort of thing, and they were marked with stakes with little white markers. That had to be separated. The plots had to be separated and catalogued and indexed or whatever, to ascertain which was best. Well, he said it didn't amount to anything really, because the soil was so different from one side to the other that it would destroy any experimental part of it. So anyway-- but he did make out rather well on that.

And then, of course, the turnip industry was touch and go. Some years were good and more were bad.

AB: Gee, that would get tiresome. Oh boy, I remember that. Sometimes you'd want to go side saddle.

DS: Yes. And you'd put the turnips in pits for the winter and then send them out in the springtime? That's when the market was better.

AB: Yes. Well, you're talking about seed turnips now?

DS: No, no, I'm talking about the turnips--

AB: Oh, well, yes. Well, of course that depended on the market and so forth. It was kind of a gamble, because sometimes the ones that you kept the longest-- and you'd have to cut some of them perhaps to make a good package-- they would bring more than all the rest of them did together, because was in short supply, you know. And the cull that you might have almost thrown away brought more money than the good stuff did previously. Sometimes when they shipped a lot of turnips, they'd get a bill back for the freight, if you can imagine that. That means all your work and time and expense, fertilizer, is down the drain.

DS: And you'd still owe them money for the freight then?

AB: Yes. Of course in the early years they used to ship a lot of them in bulk. There'd be a freight car on the siding and, oh, I suppose there would be five hundred bushel or something like

DS: Did he grow turnips for seed?

AB: Yes. Most everyone, or many people, many of the growers grew their own seed. They would take the old grown turnip, great big walloping things, you know, and they'd cut them off high on the top and leave the roots on, and those would be set out in a furrow in early spring.

DS: The tops, you would spre them in a cool place?

AB: Yes, the pit.

DS: They'd winter over and then you'd put them in the ground in the springtime?

AB: Right. And I expect they might have been, I don't know, eighteen inches apart or whatever. And they would mature and they would grow up and they would have these yellow blossoms, and then the seed pods would form on those, and there would be a time when those were dry enough so that you could cut them off with a sickle and thresh them out in the flour barrel. Winnow all the chaff out and it was like bird shot and that was your seed.

DS: How did you keep the birds from getting the seed before you could get them?

AB: You know, that's a good question, because I understand now that the few people that have been into it, the birds clean them out. The only thing I can think of is that there was so much acreage at that time, the birds were more dispersed and not such a concentrated mass. I don't really know, because it never-- I don't recall that there was any problem with birds that I can remember. But I know that Arthur Nickerson has been having trouble with them in recent years. They clean him out in any length of time.

But there was always something to do and most of it you didn't want to do, but you did it because you didn't have any choice. If you weren't hoeing weeds out of the asparagus fields, you were cultivating with a horse and a rope around your neck, which made your neck sore. And that sort of thing, you know.

DS: Your father had his own horse?

AB: No. Oh, he did earlier years, but they were old plugs that didn't last long. Mostly he hired Charlie Campbell's or Maurice Wiley's. Those were the two that were available.

DS: I remember my father had a horse, Jerry, and he was a big plowhorse. He had a back that wide and when you were riding it, you'd try to stride-- you know, get astride the horse and your legs were exactly about like that.

that to a carload, which would go on consignment to some dealer in Boston or Providence, Providence mostly. And sometimes they wouldn't even unload them. They'd dump them, you know. So people don't realize the--

DS: It was a chancy thing?

AB: Oh, gee, it was, I tell you.

DS: No government to pick up the bill if the market wasn't good?

AB: No. No, no. It really was. But it was quite an experience actually, quite an experience.

DS: Now did you do any hunting? Skunking and muskrats?

AB: Oh, yes, that was one of our sidelines. I think it was kind of a recreational thing with kids, as much as the money that you got out of it, which wasn't all that much. But, yes, a lot of the kids had a little trap line. It was skunks, muskrat-- not fox much. That was a little more. That called for a little more skill and that was a little different thing.

DS: There weren't that many fox around then, were there?

AB: Well, we didn't think so and I never had thought so as a kid, but old Joe Brown, who lived down near the Austin Research

Station-- I know my father thought he might try to get into it once, and he approached old Joe Brown to find out how he went about it. And he said, "Ah, hell, there no fox around, no fox around. Waste of time." But he went down to his barn and the whole barn, side of the barn, would be lined with fox pelts. See, but he didn't want any competition.

My daddy used to tell me, when they went down to the wood lots sometimes in the back woods there, they would trip one of his fox traps, which he set in a cart track, you know, which was a prime place for a fox to go. And he used to do pretty well at this, as trappers went.

But as kids, we got mostly into skunks, and I always wondered how the teacher ever stood-- of course you had your separate set of clothes for that purpose, but nevertheless, there's some part of it gets on you somehow somewhere. And some of these cotton gloves were probably some of the things, and they would be maybe playing snowballs and put them on the stove to dry, and the most ungodly stench. And those teachers, I don't know how they ever stood it. Of course kids can stand anything, but that was something.

DS: You trapped the skunks?

AB: Yes.

DS: Now Charlie Escobar told me about catching them alive. He'd catch them before the season and he'd keep them until the fur was

firm and then he'd, quote, harvest them. He claimed that-- he'd go out with my brother Robert, and one of them would have a flashlight-- oh, they'd have a dog, a skunking dog, who would late the skunk, then they'd hold a flashlight on the skunk and the other guy would run around the back and pick him up by the tail. And he said that if the skunk's claws or feet were not on something firm that the skunk cannot shoot this liquid. So the trick was to pick them up quick and keep them so that their paws couldn't get into anything solid. Then you'd drop them into a burlap bag and then, you know, you don't care what happens, you'd just throw it aside.

AB: Well, I've heard of that theory. I've often wondered, but I never did try it, but I guess it's true. I guess it's really true, yes.

DS: You didn't get any mink down here, did you?

AB: Well, they did. I never did, but I guess they did get a few. It calls for a little more experience, I think, and a different setup. And raccoon mustn't have been all that numerous, as compared to now, because there weren't too many caught that I remember.

DS: I don't recall that many raccoons.

AB: No. Well, you see, today you have all the garbage, all the

stuff that's around that supports me.

DS: Yes, they come and check our house every night. We see the paws on the bulkhead. They were after the bird feeder for some time and every night they'd empty that darn thing. So I keep devising ways of keeping them out. I think I've finally got it. I've made myself a shield, a sort of a cone-shaped thing that extends out about a foot and a half from the pole, and they can't get past that. At least yet. When they get real hungry in the late fall, we'll see.

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

DS: You mentioned the forest fires that were started by the trains. Can you talk about that?

AB: Well, of course this was locally and I expect they were probably pretty much up and down the line, wherever there were wooded areas that would be the type of place that would catch fire, and the sparks from the trains in a dry time would touch off these fires. Of course, the few people that were around made another fifteen or twenty-five cents an hour or whatever to fight fires and some of those fires, I guess, were quite extensive, if they got into the larger tracts of woods. And there was, as you say, some of the theory was that the blueberry pickers would touch them off deliberately, which they probably did to some extent for better blueberry picking. That was part of the

business. But nevertheless the trains did set a lot of fires, until they had a more preventive system on their stacks or whatever it was.

DS: A spark catcher?

AB: Yes. But that was one of the things that I remember as a youngster of seeing. In fact, there was one directly across in back of George Rowley's in that area, where the railroad runs over there east of Brackett's farm land, and that was a fairly good fire there. But there were many of them.

DS: How did you fight fires?

AB: Well, a shovel and a broom mostly, of course. Or they would set a back fire if they thought it necessary or prudent. Of course sometimes they just burned themselves out. I remember some. There was a big fire in Wellfleet and it just burned itself out. There was no one to fight it. Of course, you have to remember that there were so few people on the Cape in those years, you know, and whatever few there were were probably out in the Bay or somewhere else, occupied in one way or another.f

DS: I remember fires up around Sandwich and Falmouth that consumed thousands of acres. They were quite serious. But the year after the fire the blueberry bushes would come back great. I've also been told that the pitch pine-- the pine cones need a

fire to open them up so that they'll really be productive.

AB: Yes. Well, of course, when they used to pick cones for decorative purposes, that was another thing that was a nickel-and-dime industry, but there were those that did it. Of course these would be unopened. They would be hard things, and they would take them and either lay them in the sun or put them where they were warm and then they would open up, as they needed to be for decorative purposes. Yes, that was one of the things we did.

DS: What else did you do to earn a buck?

AB: Well, we picked blueberries, I guess, a little bit. There weren't that many things. Of course, if you worked on someone else's property besides your own, you might get twenty-five cents an hour. That would be top wage then, whatever it was you were doing. It was so different then. There was always plenty to do, but there wasn't any money in it. That's about the size of it.

DS: I know some people would send wreaths. Red berries and pine boughs. You picked bayberries sometimes? You could sell them?

AB: Yes. And mayflowers, that's the thing I forgot.

DS: We used to sell those to Quinny Shaw's golfers, remember?

AB: Is that so?

DS: Did you ever do that?

AB: No, I don't recall doing that. I know they used to sell them, but I didn't realize that--

DS: We would take all the leaves off, most of the leaves off, and make these bouquets-- what, about three inches in diameter? Just mayflowers. And you'd wrap some wires around the stems and sell that for fifty cents or seventy-five cents.

AB: That's a lot of money.

DS: When you think of all the mayflower plants that you ruined in collecting those few mayflowers!

AB: Nobody thought anything of it.

DS: Well, they survived quite nicely.

AB: Sure. Well, that was one of the things. Yes, people did that in those years and they would set them on the flower market or wherever. That was some of the nickel or two.

DS: And pond lilies, I guess you could sell pond lilies.

AB: I guess you could, yes.

DS: I know my wife Reta used to spend her summers on Nantucket and she'd sell pond lilies. There was a guy named Michie Ray who really developed these lighthouse baskets and he also collected pond lilies, and he'd put them in various colored inks and the pond lilies would take on the color of the ink. Then he had several little girls who would sit on the streets and sell these pond lilies. Her beat was Scionset. She'd take the bus from the center of Nantucket way up to Scionset and sit in the square there and sell them.

Well, you mentioned Valentine's Day and that was a big event with Otto Nickerson.

AB: Yes. To me it was big, because it was a way to get away from school books. [Laughter] That's a big event. But that was a very happy affair and a terrific thing, it really was.

DS: He was a wonderful man really, a wonderful teacher.

AB: Yes, he was.

DS: He made life exciting, didn't he?

AB: Yes, he did. Interesting things. Another thing they used to do, they had these bird walks, and they would go down around Minister's Pond, around like that, you know. It was fun.

DS: Did you go camping out when you were a kid?

AB: Not too excessively. Only on our own property. I had a tent that I bought and I used to sleep in it, but the ridiculous part of it was-- it was in the summer and it was stifling hot in the thing, but just for the sake of sleeping in the tent, I would endure that. You know, just to be in the tent. I had a kerosene lamp that hung on the upright, the pole, there. Had a little cot there. But, no, I never went any distance or anything like that.

Where we lived, up on the farm in the bungalow at the corner, that was the old Route 6, or the King's Highway, and it was on a curve which was banked the wrong way, you know, and you'd be sitting at the table any time of the day or night and you'd hear a car southbound, down by Ed Horton's, and you'd say, "He isn't gonna make it." You could tell at that time and point, because of his RPMs. Sure enough, he'd get to the corner, it would be scream, bump, bang, crash, and he'd go off the road at least and sometimes turn over. There were so many, many of those accidents. Most of them were not serious, but very inconvenient.

DS: Well, there was A. C. Lee's corner. Do you recall A. C. Lee's corner?

AB: That was another one. That's further up. Yes, that was a bad one too.

DS: They had a lot of accidents there.

AB: There was. And there was one fatality there, I recall. Among those that came to grief there, there was this chap that was bound back to Connecticut in a big 1932 or 1933 Lincoln touring car. Big, heavy car. And he had been into the bottle a little too much before he left. Well, anyway, he came up-- he got as far as that corner and went off the road and went across the road into the bushes, and the small doors that those touring cars had had been open all the way from Wellfleet. He lost portraits, pet cat, I don't know, and at that point there was a set of solid silverware that just spewed out in the asparagus beds, you know. We gathered it all up and put it back in the car, and two years later we were cultivating up there and we cultivated out a green packet of ice cream spoons that had been missed, that covered up. But I'll always remember that one.

DS: The roads weren't that good in those days?

AB: No.

DS: The main road was tarred, but a lot of the side roads were just sand, ruts.

AB: Yes. Well, Massasoit Road-- let's see, somewhere around the antique place, Bresnehan's, north was just cinders. It was a cinder affair. That's what it was from there to where it went

out to-- .

The roads about the time-- let's see, in the nineteen-thirties, late twenties and thirties, there was something on the surface that made an oil, a slick, and cars would go into skids if the road was even damp. They'd go into skids for almost no reason at all and pile up. I remember that. They overcame that in later years, but that was one of the faults.

DS: I remember the trains. And the evening mail was a big social event?

AB: Oh, it was absolutely was. Yes. Down at our end of the town, in North Eastham, of course Obed Horton had the post office and there was a summer colony that always gathered there. And when the night train came in, of course, the mail was brought down in a car or something, and as kids we'd be over there around the depot, watching the train come in like that. As you did too, of course. But that was a very fascinating affair.

DS: Well, a social event-- all the young bucks would be there and you'd meet the girls?

AB: Yes. Well, most of the girls were summer girls and they were kind of in a separate category, you know. The aristocrats, you might say.

DS: They didn't mix with the Townies?

AB: Not too much. Not too much, no. But that seemed to be on the biggest parts of their summer season, was getting down to that post office.

TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO:

DS: We were just starting to talk about things we did for entertainment, other than going for the mail. Of course there were high school dances and senior proms and the junior hop.

AB: This was a little bit later, but not much. But anyway, before that you would go, if you could get off the place and had done your chores and everything, you could fishing maybe with the boys. They'd stop and pick you up. We'd go up around the ponds and we did a lot of fishing, fresh water fishing.

In the winter it was skating, sliding down hill on sleds and so forth like that. But the skating things, you would go-- maybe after you got home from school, you'd come home and get a bite to eat and you'd go back again at night. There would be a bonfire. No one thought anything of a big bonfire in those days. And it was very nice, you know, and I just wonder where all the energy came from or where it went.

And then, of course, when we went to school, if the ground was snow-covered, the bus, the old Model-T bus, would be filled with sleds or dragging sleds or whatever, you know, and at the recess time you'd be out there sliding down hill and so forth.

Those were some of the things we did. There were other things that don't come to mind, but--

DS: Well, there was the May basket hanging.

AB: Oh yes, that's right. That was a late spring thing. That was very active, yes.

DS: Everyone would contribute a piece of candy or something or other and hang it on the doorknob of the person and knock on the door. I don't think we even had doorbells in those days. You'd knock on the door and run. Then the person who was having the May basket hung on them would have to find the others, and when he or she found somebody, then they had to join in finding the others. Then you'd go back to the house and--

AB: The host would have to put on the party.

DS: Right.

AB: [Laughs] Thinking back on it, I wonder if they were always all that agreeable. They had to be in a way, but-- [Laughter] Kind of an imposition, you might say.

DS: Well, the mother must have been warned in advance, because they had always had cocoa or doughnuts or something. Then you'd play spin the bottle and post office.

AB: Those were wild times.

DS: Then you'd make taffy. Remember that? You'd have a taffy pull.

AB: Yes. And popcorn. They were simple things by today's standards, but you'd like to get back to them again, that's for sure.

DS: When you think of all the time that's consumed in watching TV. You know, what did you do with your time?

AB: I know it. I know it, yes. Well, you had books. A few books, I suppose. If you ever were lucky enough sometimes to-- and that was very infrequent, but some of it would have traveled a lot and tell stories of their travels and like that. It was very fascinating. When I was very small-- of course, where I was born, that was a boarding house and people would come there for the summer. Some did and some didn't. Some went back on the afternoon train. Of course, you have to remember in those years the mosquitoes were by the billions, you know, and everything was by shank's mare mostly. And you remember the different families and people that came there. Some loved it and some didn't, but it was certainly a different way of life.

DS: I was trying to think of some of those families that came

down every summer and whether any of their descendants are here now.

AB: Well, down the Campground area there were the Duncans, the Bells, the Hortons. There was a number of Horton families. The Blanchards. And Mrs. Townsend. She was probably very much a socialite, you know. She entertained a lot. She had a big place in those years. She put on these parties from time to time and she was very elite, you might say. Of course, she owned a number of places around there too. I remember her husband, Harry Townsend. A very nice gentleman. He was in some kind of an industry in Connecticut and I can't recall what it was now. It might have been something to do with new departure, I'm not sure.

DS: Well then the Depression came along and that changed a lot of things.

AB: Oh, yes. Well, things were sure tight. Actually those of us on the Cape were probably better off than we realized, because you couldn't starve to death very well.

DS: We didn't live that well before the Depression and the Depression didn't change things that much actually.

AB: That's right.

DS: When you see the breadline pictures.

AB: Yes. Suicides and so forth.

DS: Yes, suicides and children with malnutrition. We didn't have any of that. People lived reasonably well. You could always grow some vegetables, keep a pig and a cow, and scratch some quahogs.

AB: That's true. Of course the summer colonies, as we think of them then, were so teeny as compared with today's people. The Campground thing, they had--I don't know how many families there were, but there were very few cottages and they were very abbreviated.

DS: That's right. They were really primitive.

AB: Sure, there were.

DS: Ed Brown used to come down.

AB: He did. That's a name I forgot. Right.

DS: He talks about playing baseball.

AB: Yes, that's right. We had scrub games down there in a field. It's no longer a field now, there's a house and trees there. It's near the Ameraso property. There was a field there

and on that field they tell me that they used to tar the nets for the fish weirs. In fact, a great big tar spot is there now in somebody's yard, and that's where we used to play baseball.

DS: Now where is this?

AB: Let's see, precisely-- well, do you know where the cottage with the red tiled roof-- do you recall seeing that?

DS: Oh, yes. It's off Nauset Road.

AB: No, Campground. You go down Campground Road and it's just a short way before you get to that old, old saltbox. It's on the left. On the same side is a cottage with red tile roof. That was the Ameraso cottage. That's the original cottage they had. And just before that on the same side was where this little field was. I can recall it, it was all open at that time. And I think, in fact, it was a pasture at one time. I can't imagine any grass there, but that's where they pastured the cow anyway. So that's where the little field was and it was fenced in on the road side and back on the side.

DS: I know Ed Brown has talked about those baseball games, and he mentioned Mrs. Townsend. She was going to give a party for the-- the Townies were playing the summer boys and she was going to give a party for the winners of the game. Do you recall that?

AB: I don't seem to, but I don't doubt it. That sounds very typical of her. No, I don't seem to recall that particular thing. I know that she was very fond of flowers and there was a lot of flower gardens around the place there.

DS: Now did you caddy for Quinty Shaw?

AB: Yes. Yes.

DS: Were you caddying when Bobby Jones was down there?

AB: I don't recall him, but I could have. I don't seem to recall that name.

DS: I know your brother Louis had one of these old Cedar Banks buttons. He had it on at the grammar school reunion day. In fact, Dan Shay got a real close-up view of it with his video camera.

AB: Is that right? Good. Well, you know, that was another experience, of course, when your dad used to come up here to the grammar school and could he get a couple of boys to caddy? That would be before school closing time. I don't know, two o'clock or whatever. And if you were lucky enough to be picked, that was utopia, you know, and once in a while I did. Anyway, but then you would get a notice perhaps to appear on a certain day, a Saturday or whatever. Or in the summertime it could be any day.

You know, it was very-- it made quite an impression on a kid.
You know, all that wealth.

DS: There was a lot of money coming down there. Mostly though they were very nice people. They were kindly, they were gentle. They didn't treat the local boys badly at all. In fact, they were very nice. We used to have to carry messages up to the house, because Mr. Shaw didn't have a telephone. So the messages would come to our phone and my mother would send us up with a note. We always loved that, because they were so nice to us and they'd always give us a gift of a piece of chocolate. Boy, the best chocolate you'd ever had. Or a navel orange about six inches in diameter. It was really great.

AB: Well, I remember once being up there and Mr. Shaw came out and your dad was there and he said, "Dan, go down to the camp and get-- I don't know, a dozen or fifteen ducks, will you?" They

used to have duck dinners, I suppose, there. Of course, he owned the duck blind over on Great Pond, right?

DS: Well, he was on the partners. There were three or four partners, but he was on the principals in it.

AB: I suppose they were going to have a duck feast, you know. A black duck dinner or something like that. But it was very fascinating.

I remember that one morning that we appeared and on the lawn out in front of the clubhouse was this beautiful varnished tripod with a-- I can't remember whether it was big binoculars or a telescope, but it was probably a Zeiss or one of the most expensive kind, and we were taking turns looking at a fishing schooner way off shore there. It was terrific.

DS: One of my memories is waiting outside there to caddy and seeing the ashcan-- you know, these big barrels-- full of whiskey bottles. Whiskey, gin and rye and scotch. The aroms from the clubhouse was just a rich blend of whiskey and toast and coffee.

AB: They must have had some great times there. I know one morning that they were going to tee off and this chap came out-- I had no idea who he was-- and he started, he said, "It's no use, Quinty, I can't do it." And back in the clubhouse he went. He knew better than to start. [Laughter]

DS: There was a lot of drinking, but generally they played.

AB: Oh, sure. And didn't they have-- is it a barbecue I'm trying to say?

DS: A clambake.

AB: Clambake, that's the word I'm trying to think of. And did Winnie Knowles put them on?

DS: Yes.

AB: I was thinking he did.

DS: There was first-class clambakes. They were done right. You know, the rocks with a huge fire and the rocks would get red hot. Then he'd put down the seaweed and the clams and the lobster and the ears of corn and potatoes. There's a story. Do you remember the former Speaker of the House? He came down to Eastham.

AB: McCormack?

DS: No, it was before that. Anyway, he had an alcohol problem and I think that's why he left Boston and came down here. He wanted to get an invitation to one of these clambakes in the worst way, but he couldn't wangle it, so what he did was to get a canoe and get dressed up as an Indian, all painted up as an

Indian, and he paddled around out of Salt Pond through the river and down to the marshes, down to the Cedar Banks boathouse, where they had the clambake. And he got near the shore, and he had a proclamation he read, which was, you know, "The Indians welcome these white people to their shores and come in peace," and all this, you know. And it was a very nice proclamation. But Quinty's gang had had a few drinks and they started throwing rocks at him. I think they sunk his canoe.

AB: Is that right? [Laughter] I thought you were going to say they welcomed him with open arms.

DS: Oh, no.

AB: Holy smokes! So the little gimmick didn't work then?

DS: I can remember too some of them trying to play after that. And it was in August. The one I remember was in August, when the flatiron flies are just terrible, and these guys were so stoned, they didn't even feel the flies biting them. They were trying to play golf and the flies were biting them. So we caddied. You know, that was a dollar for eighteen holes. You caddied whatever the conditions were.

AB: Gee! Only seems like yesterday. Well, it was a fairway then, I guess, but if you went off from where used to be, off towards Salt Pond,

that slope there, where the Richardson house is now, it was all open then.

DS: That's right. That was the fairway. It was a devilish hole to play, because there was almost a forty-five degree angle there on the slope, and if your ball hit, it would always kick to the right and kick right down towards the Salt Pond. Then the next hole you'd play over the river, then get in the boat and pull yourself across. The scow. And get yourself across.

AB: That went up within a stone's throw of the Town Hall, didn't it? Then it turned around and went back by Luce's?

DS: That's right. And you played back and forth there several holes and then you'd come back over the river with the boat, the scow, again.

AB: Your mother and dad used to stop and call on us frequently and it was so interesting to talk with them. And he would tell about little different things that were so interesting.

DS: He was a good friend of your father's, I know.

AB: Oh, yes. I remember, as a kid, he used to drop down there, you know. Of course your dad was in asparagus big too, wasn't he?

DS: Yes. We shipped a lot of asparagus. He raised turnips too. He was a busy man.

AB: But, you know, I always think-- of course, as a kid you don't think of those things, but they had a little bit of a struggle. Gee, I tell you, I look at myself and say, how well would you have done in those circumstances?

[TAPE RECORDER TURNED OFF]

DS: You were talking about when times were slack on the farm, with the Campbells you'd go with the horse and buggy.

AB: Well, we'd go up to the Herring Brook after herring, to get the roe, which was a delicacy, of course. And we might be gone all afternoon and part of the night, you know, as kids will, and run up and down that brook and so forth after those herring.

And we went up there late one day and either Tom wasn't tied or he got-- anyway, he got loose one way or another, whether we didn't tie the horse or what. So we come to go home, Tom was gone. He'd got tired of waiting for us kids and he'd taken off and gone home with the wagon and all. Of course Charlie's dad knew what the situation was when the horse came in the yard, so he came up and picked us up. But I always remember that, that we didn't tie the horse that time.

But it was a lot of fun, you know, and one of the diversions that we had.

DS: How did you catch the herring, with nets?

AB: Pitchforks. We could have netted them, I guess, and we did use a net sometimes.

DS: You'd just pitchfork them out of the water?

AB: Yes. Well, I mean you'd spear the things. That was part of the fun, I guess. But you'd go from the beach end of the brook down to where it went into the little Herring Pond, as we called it then, you know, and chase them up and down that thing..

DS: I remember going there with the Hayes boys. God, they were fast. They could catch the herring with their hands. You'd see them running along and-- boom, they'd have the herring. And we'd bring them home and my mother would say, "Oh, why do you bring those things home? Throw them away."

AB: Well, you know, when my dad had the farm, he had the idea-- where was it, somewhere, where was it, up around Sagamore country, somewhere, they had a thing that they processed these herring scales into some kind of artificial pearls. It's a strange procedure and I don't understand it, but that's what they did anyway. Well, of course, they had all this trash-- the fish, you know-- left over. And they hit on the idea of broadcasting, you know, an acre, an acre and a half, as you plant carrots.

Well, they came down with this truck of these stinking, rotten fish. Oh, gee, it was horrible. Well, they were forked onto the ground, and in those years a lot of the summer folks would cut through by the south end of the piece to get to the shore. Well, it was comical. They'd get opposite those fish and they'd crank the windows right up quick, you know. [Laughter] But the swallows-- hundreds of thousands of swallows after the flies. But finally they were plowed under. That was the end of it. I guess it turned out rather well, but I'll always remember that. It was a lot for a little, you might say.

DS: I've heard them using herring as a fertilizer.

AB: Yes, the Indians did, I guess.

DS: But my experience is, you put a herring in, bury a herring, and you're going to have a bunch of skunks after that herring.

AB: That's right. Yes, that's true. Well, you know-- of course this is another area, but another thing we used to do-- this is somewhat in later years, although all through years, when farming was in its heyday, they would find an occasional arrowhead. Indian arrowheads, which some made a collection of, and we had a fair collection, but most of our collection was accumulated in later years, when we'd go looking for the things on different sites, you know. Of course those sites are long gone,

obliterated by development or one reason or another. And you think of those Indians and the way they lived. Of course an old man was eighteen years old then. And I can understand that. But how did they exist-- and maybe they didn't always-- in a hard winter? You know, you just had these two things here and what's up here to get by on.

DS: They did exist and did very well.

AB: Oh, yes. But it seems to be a lost thing insofar as their habitat or what they had. They talk about these lean-to affairs or some kind of a circular thing that they lived in. I don't know whether that's a fact or not, but they must have been in a very sheltered location, if there was such a thing in the winter.

DS: A lot of them were up near Fort Hill, in that area.

AB: Oh, yes. That would be a prime place, because they had access to the marsh, which was a good source of living there. The shellfish and everything.

DS: And of course that's where the Indian sharpening stone was found.

AB: That's right. I bet your dad has found many pieces over on the farm there. Of course, working there. That would be nice, a good place.

DS: Well, perhaps we are running out of gas here. Why don't we cut this off?

AB: Sure.

END OF SESSION